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Communist Participation in the Italian Government?

Summary

[redacted] Socialist President Pertini and some Christian Democratic leaders -- among them Foreign Minister Andreotti -- are seriously considering ways of bringing the Communists into the next government coalition. Despite the interest of these senior leaders in striking a deal with the Communists, we believe movement in this direction will be difficult because there would be strong opposition to the idea within both the Christian Democratic and Communist parties. If both sides are serious about pursuing such a deal, however, we should see signs of changing political winds within the next several weeks. [redacted]

Pertini's Proposals

[redacted] Pertini wants to be remembered, as the president who brought the "entire" movement into the leadership of the country. [redacted]

[redacted] Andreotti is widely renowned for his maneuvering ability, and Pertini considers him the only DC leader capable of successfully engineering a new opening to the PCI.

[redacted] Pertini and a number of political leaders anticipate that the Craxi government will come under heavy pressure early this spring. Craxi was installed in August, and the average life span of Italian governments in the postwar period has been less than a year. [redacted]

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This is not the first time that Pertini has raised the issue of PCI participation in government. [redacted]

[redacted] During the difficult negotiations to form the Craxi government, Pertini threatened that if the center-left parties were unable to agree he would charge Craxi with forming a government of "national unity" that would include the PCI. [redacted]

In addition to Pertini's avowed hope to bring the "entire workers' movement" into the government, we believe that he may want to bring the Communists into the political mainstream as a way of giving Italian governments stronger majorities. Pertini has repeatedly expressed concern over the growing instability of Italian governments and is distressed by the possibility that an early national election may have to be held for the fifth time in nine years. [redacted]

We believe that Pertini shares the analysis of those scholars and journalists who insist that the Italian system is seriously flawed by the lack of an acceptable government formula involving the Communists as an alternative to governments dominated by the DC. He may reason that participation in a government of national unity would force the PCI to play a responsible role and ultimately strengthen its legitimacy. In the long run, he may reason, this could open the way to an alternation of power between left and right. [redacted]

Christian Democratic Interest

Pertini's ideas apparently have aroused serious interest on the part of Andreotti and some Christian Democrats. Andreotti's ultimate political goal is to become President of the Republic and [redacted] he is convinced that he will not be elected without Communist support.* He probably believes a DC-PCI rapprochement would ease the way for him. [redacted]

Since June some members of the DC left have also expressed interest in an agreement with the PCI. With the DC's own weight in Parliament considerably reduced because of the last election, these politicians hearken back to the late 1970s when Andreotti led a series of broadly-based governments to which the Communists gave parliamentary support in exchange for consultation on policy matters. This enabled the Christian Democrats and Communists to enforce their will in Parliament on a number of key issues. Even some DC leaders wary of dealing with the Communists note that the DC has lost leverage with the Socialists and the small parties by ruling out a deal with the Communists. [redacted]

* The president is chosen by an electoral college consisting mainly of members of Parliament. As the second largest party in Parliament, the Communists have often played a key role in determining who becomes president. [redacted]

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Obstacles to a DC-PCI Rapprochement

Although we believe that the above account of Pertini's attitudes is essentially accurate, it seems to us that in his enthusiasm Pertini is glossing over the risks and difficulties for both Andreotti and Berlinguer if they pursue this course. [redacted]

[redacted] An attempt by Andreotti to convince the DC to bring the PCI into the governing coalition or to agree to a government of national unity would encounter stiff opposition from the Christian Democratic rightwing. Andreotti's task would be easier if attempts to resurrect a traditional four- or five-party center-left coalition ran into serious difficulty. Under those circumstances he would be in position to argue more persuasively that the parties had run out of other options. Even under these circumstances, however, final agreement would require extraordinarily delicate negotiations. The chief problem would be the conflicting political needs of the Christian Democrats and Communists: the DC would want an ambiguous accord that various factions could interpret in different ways, while Berlinguer would be seeking explicit language to satisfy PCI skeptics who will demand a high price for the party's cooperation. [redacted]

Pertini's plans might at first blush appear attractive to Berlinguer, but cooperation with the Christian Democrats entails serious risks for the Communists. In fact, [redacted]

[redacted] Berlinguer remained noncommittal [redacted] The Communist Party engaged in similar negotiations during the mid-1970s with former DC leader Aldo Moro. The party's failures during that period to gain entrance into the Cabinet or to gain many policy victories in return for PCI parliamentary support contributed both to the recent growing dissension within the Party leadership and the Party's disappointing recent election performances. [redacted]

We thus believe that Berlinguer will be wary of any arrangement that fails to provide explicit guarantees from his potential partners on the government's program, the distribution of ministerial and subministerial portfolios, and the PCI's role in the decisionmaking process. In our view, Berlinguer would insist this time on at least one major ministry and several second-level ministries. Berlinguer might take advantage of the precedent of the late PCI leader Togliatti's tenure as Minister of Justice in the immediate postwar period to demand that slot. In addition, he would likely be interested in at least one social welfare portfolio like Health, an economic ministry -- Budget for example -- and a lesser foreign affairs post, such as the Ministry of Merchant Marine. He would probably be reluctant, at least for the near future to push for the Foreign Affairs, Defense, Interior, or Treasury posts. The Communists are likely to acknowledge privately that by seeking such sensitive high-profile ministries they would increase the anxiety of opponents at home and invite a harsh reaction from the United States [redacted]

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Should Berlinguer become convinced that it is in his party's interest to give the government parliamentary support even if his potential coalition partners are unwilling to give him cabinet seats, he could make PCI support contingent upon the appointment of a number of "independent" technicians whose views correspond to those of the PCI. However, Berlinguer almost certainly would insist that such an arrangement include a specific timetable for bringing Communists into the Cabinet after a reasonable interval.

[redacted]
Warning Signs

If Andreotti and Berlinguer decided to try some variation of Pertini's plan, we would expect hints to begin appearing in the next several weeks.

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We would also expect to see a spate of articles both in the Communist press and the non-party press emphasizing the country's institutional and economic ills. President Pertini would probably also play more frequently on the theme of Italy's "ungovernability", emphasizing that the parties are running out of other options. At the same time, we would expect several prominent journalists sympathetic to the PCI to return to the 1976-79 theme that Italy's ills can only be cured if the country's Catholics and Communists work together.

[redacted]

We would probably also see both parties begin to play down their differences on major foreign policy questions. In this regard, we would expect the DC to emphasize that its arguments favoring eventual withdrawal of the MNF contingent and resumption of the START and INF talks are not very different from those of the PCI. For its part the PCI would underscore its past criticisms of the Soviets over Poland, Afghanistan, and Czechoslovakia and emphasize Berlinguer's recent personal efforts to have the suspended arms talks resumed.

[redacted]

The Communists might also begin to highlight once again their key role in the legislative process. In the mid-seventies the PCI was at pains to point out that their parliamentary proposals were often later adopted by Christian Democratic-led governments.

[redacted]

Finally, US officials could expect to begin hearing reassurances from DC and PCI leaders that times have changed and that the PCI can safely be brought into government without serious damage to US or NATO interests. Andreotti, for example, probably would argue that governmental participation could undermine the Communists as it has in France. Although Andreotti would put a high priority on reassuring the United States, he seems less sensitive to US objections than in the past. We thus

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doubt that Washington's reservations would weigh as heavily in his calculations as heretofore, particularly once he and the Communists had reached agreement on the most difficult issues. [redacted]

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